



Aalborg Universitet

AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

The Class Thesis Revisited

Social Dynamics and Welfare State Change

Harrits, Gitte Sommer

Publication date:
2006

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Harrits, G. S. (2006). *The Class Thesis Revisited: Social Dynamics and Welfare State Change*. Paper presented at ESPAnet Conference 2006, Bremen, Germany.
http://www.espanet2006.de/downloads/ESPAnet2006_paper_Harrits.pdf

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal -

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at vbn@aub.aau.dk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

The class thesis revisited:

Social dynamics and welfare state change

**Paper presented at the ESPAnet Conference 2006,
21-23 September, University of Germany, Bremen.**

First draft. Please do not quote without permission of the author. Comments are welcome!

By Ph D, Assistant Professor
Gitte Sommer Harrits
Centre for Comparative Welfare Studies,
Aalborg University, Denmark
e-mail: gsh@socsci.aau.dk

Abstract

Originally, political explanations referring to the social dynamics of different groups or classes were important in understanding the constitution and expansion of the welfare state. However, today it seems as if these explanations are considered a voice from the past. However, as this paper wishes to argue, the notion of class is by no means obsolete to the understanding of welfare state change. Drawing on the works of Pierre Bourdieu, the paper suggests an understanding of class that takes the social and structural transformations of late modernity into consideration. Therefore, it is suggested, it can be fruitful in understanding social dynamics and welfare state change.

The paper primarily presents a theoretical discussion. The Bourdieuan conceptions will be discussed, but the main part of the paper will focus on discussing how these concepts can fertilize the discussions of welfare state change. Here, three major points will be made:

First, the concept of capital (economic *and* cultural) presents a broadening of the conception of structurally based power and the constitution of 'objective' social class positions. Hence, new and different classes, class fractions, conflicts and alliances can be suggested compared to a traditional Marxist or Weberian framework. For example, the conflict between cultural and economic fractions of the upper and middle classes could be seen as presenting a conflict between two different understandings of and political projects for the welfare state.

Second, the concepts of objective positions and symbolic positionings (and the claim that the two separate configurations tend to be homologous), introduce a new way of understanding the 'link' between structure and agency. The Bourdieuan framework thus insists on the continuing importance of the structural foundation of practices, identities and ideas, but also leaves room for the autonomy of the symbolic level.

Finally, the concept of the field integrates the analysis of stratification with the analysis of functional differentiation and specialisation (as theorized by for example Niklas Luhmann). As Bourdieu suggests, understanding change within a field means understanding the specific positions, struggles and strategic context of the field. However, such positions also tend to be homologous with positions in the broader social space, and, changes in the welfare state policies can be thus understood as the transformation of broader social positions and symbolic positionings/discourses into concrete positions within a narrow field of welfare politics.

Introduction: Welfare state change in theory and substance

No doubt, welfare states are changing. Intense scientific and political debates, in the last decade or so, point to this fact. As Esping-Andersen argues, present times can be compared to periods of transformation and intense reform in the 1930-40's as well as the closing decade of the nineteenth century. Today, again, we are witnessing profound social changes and challenges, along with political and ideological confrontations on how to promote the 'Good Society' (Esping-Andersen, 2002: 1-5).

Not unsurprisingly, there is no consensus on the scope, dynamics or consequences of change. For example, sociologists disagree on the character and content of social change. Are we witnessing the coming of a post-industrial society, a new risk society, individualization and reflexivity, or are the contours of modernity, forms of differentiations, and distributions of power more persistent than that? Also, political scientists disagree on the dynamics of change. Do we still need to consider social classes as important social and political agents, or is it necessary to take institutions and preferences of agents into consideration when analysing political change? And politicians (as well as social scientists) disagree on the diagnosis of the challenges facing the nation/welfare states, as well as suitable solutions. Is there an immense pressure for retrenchment and privatisation due to globalisation, demographic changes, and unemployment, or do we need to strengthen and not weaken welfare state measures in light of a future 'knowledge economy', changing gender roles, threats of inequality and new social risks?

Within welfare state research there seems to be a convergence of theoretical developments and the substantial diagnosis of welfare state development. On the one hand, one can distinguish between at least four different ways of explaining the nature and changes of welfare states (see also Goul Andersen, 2000; van Kersbergen, 1995): 1) a *functionalist* explanation, focusing on welfare states as direct responses to social and economic problems, 2) a *political* explanation, seeing welfare states as outcomes of political battles between different social groups (or classes) with different powers and resources; 3) an *institutional* explanation, concentrating on legal, bureaucratic or organizational frameworks constituting limitations on actions, as well as different preferences and different logics of actions, including a logic of path-dependency; and finally, 4) a *constructivist* explanation, taking primarily the learning and transfer of ideas as well as the framing of political problems into consideration.

On the other hand, these different theoretical approaches, today, seem to roughly fit different substantial diagnoses: The political logic seems to be used primarily in relation to the expansion of

the welfare state, institutional explanations (most evidently, of course, the path-dependency thesis) seem to be concentrated on the question of reproduction, inertia and resistance to change, and functionalist as well as constructivist theories (although in a very different manner) focus on the changes and restructuring of welfare states.

This is, of course, a very rough description, and, no doubt, with many exceptions. However, for the purpose of the present argument, I shall underline one aspect of the convergence of theory and substance. As can be seen in many other areas of social sciences, there seems to be a widespread consensus within welfare state research that theories of class are relevant only in the past tense. Hence, causal explanations of political transformations taking into consideration class interest and class power are judged to be good explanations for the (first half of the) 20th century, but completely obsolete when it comes to changes of post-industrial society. Reasons for this are widespread. Some argue, that classes simply no longer exist in post-industrial society (e.g. Pakulski & Waters, 1996), some argue that (especially Marxist) class theory are ridden with too many theoretical and epistemological flaws (e.g. Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), and some argue for the transformations of politics as the main reason for no longer taking classes into consideration (e.g. Pierson, 1994: 28-30; Lipset & Clark, 1991).

This paper wishes to argue, that no matter the reason given, the exclusion of class theory from welfare state research may be premature. Although class theory in its original forms (as formulated by e.g. Marx and Weber and their “neo”-followers) certainly cannot be directly applied in post-industrial society, there are good reasons for holding on to some form of class analytical approach:

Probably far more due to structural transformation than to the efficacy of existing welfare programmes, the traditional class divide is, no doubt, eroding. This would, as many social scientist claim, indicate that class no longer matters. The irony is that class may be less visible, but its importance is arguably far more decisive. In knowledge-intensive economies, life chances will depend on one's accumulation of human capital. As is well established, the impact of social inheritance is as strong today as in the past – in particular with regard to cognitive development and educational attainment. (Esping-Andersen, 2002: 3)

In other words, one should be careful not to conflate theoretical and substantial developments. Yes, social change is certainly a fact, and class structures are changing, but are they disappearing altogether? And yes, many class theories of the past are neither theoretically nor epistemologically sound, but does this mean that we cannot present *any* fruitful class analytical approach? And finally, is it necessary to present class theory in opposition to other theoretical approaches?

In this paper I argue ‘no’ to all of these questions and discuss how aspects of the Bourdieuan approach can be used to reintroduce a class perspective on welfare state change, relevant also in post-industrial society. Further, I discuss the possibility of integrating different theoretical approaches as different layers of causality or different aspects of social dynamics. Here my claim is that it is possible to think of class theory as focusing on a certain level of causality, not necessarily in opposition to social order (as considered by functionalist), institutions or ideas.

I take my point of departure in a brief critical discussion of traditional uses of class and power resource theory within welfare state research. Then, I move on to a discussion of three important aspects of the Bourdieuan approach, namely first, the idea of multiple forms of power (or capital), second, the conception of structure and agency, and, third, different forms of differentiation in late modernity. Within each discussion, I concentrate on the possible contributions from Bourdieuan theory to welfare state research and, when relevant, try to formulate different hypotheses.

As can be seen from this outlook, the paper is solely theoretical, although an effort is made towards the formulation of hypotheses relevant for empirical research. Focus will be on the discussion of class theory and the social dynamics relevant for the explanation of political changes and changes in the welfare state. This also means that I do not discuss the conceptualization or empirical operationalization of ‘the welfare state’, and I will refer to this concept in a rather vague and broad manner. However, my own background is in Scandinavian Welfare State and Scandinavian Political Science, so it may be that the Scandinavian or Social Democratic Welfare Regime is projected as the common sense image of *a* welfare state. This is not intentional, but not intentionally avoided either. Further research must develop the relevance of Bourdieuan class theory in relation to different Welfare Regimes or Models.

Classes and power resources in welfare state research

The theme of class differences and the welfare state has been discussed throughout the last century. On the one hand, the effects of the welfare state on class differences have been pointed out (e.g. Marshall, 1950). On the other hand, class theory has been used to provide a causal analysis of welfare state development, partly in opposition to more functionalist accounts and trying to emphasise how ‘politics matter’. Often, the class thesis has been connected to a thesis of the importance of social democracy, and a more specific hypothesis of working class strength, social democracy and welfare state development has been put forward (e.g. Esping-Andersen & Korpi, 1984, 1987, see also van Kersbergen, 1995: 12-16). This has been opposed or supplemented by

researchers arguing that the social positions or groups relevant in this causal chain are not classes but e.g. 'risks groups' (Baldwin, 1990), that the strength of the working class should be combined with the weakness of other classes (Castles, 1978, 1985), or that what is most important is the construction of different class alliances (Esping-Andersen, 1990). I shall not go further into a broad discussion of these different debates, but instead concentrate on a discussion of the power resource theory as formulated by Korpi (1978, 1983, 1985, 2001) and Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999; see also O'Connor & Olsen, 1998). This is done, first of all, to engage in debate with the most thoroughly developed theoretical position (e.g. van Kersbergen, 1995: 14) that can also be seen as the most influential (Pierson, 1984: 27). And secondly, it provides for a theoretical discussion of the structural basis of different class positions, the connection between social structure and class structure, and the causal mechanisms implied, including the structure-agency link. As will be evident from discussions below, these are also the main elements in my theoretical argument.

The power resources theory or approach has been developed "in debates with major strands of social scientific thought" (Korpi, 1998: vii), among them Marxism and neo-Marxism, functionalism, pluralism and other approaches to the study of power. In recent years, it seems as if power resources theory has moved towards a more "non-Marxist" formulation, drawing explicitly on rational actor theory (Korpi, 2001) and the neo-Weberian class theory of John Goldthorpe (Korpi & Palme, 2003a, 2003b). However, concepts, theoretical setup, causal mechanisms and empirical hypotheses seem to be more or less unchanged.

The basic claim in power resources theory is that power differences between major social actors, grounded in the social structure of society, are the basis for the development of social institutions, among them the welfare state (e.g. Korpi, 1978: 37-54, 1983, xx-xx, 1998, 2001: 242-250). Hence, power resources theory involves claims i) as to what kinds of power resources are basic in capitalist societies, and consequently, who are the most important (dominant and dominated) actors in politics; and ii) suggests a set of causal and intentional mechanisms resulting in hypotheses regarding the institutional consequences of these power differences, i.e. the development of the welfare state.

i) The theoretical argument pointing out the most important actors in political struggles takes its point of departure in a discussion of different kinds of power resources, defined as "the ability to punish or reward other actors" (Korpi, 1983: XX). These resources can take on a variety of forms, characterized by a variety of dimensions:

Dimension		Economic capital / means of production	Labour power/ human capital	Means of Violence
Domain	Number of people who are receptive	++	-	++
Scope	Varieties of situations applicable	++	-	++
Scarcity		++	--	--
Centrality	How essential for peoples lives	+	++	?
Convertibility	... to other power resources	++	--	+
Concentration	Can they be concentrated	++	--	++
Costs	... involved in mobilization (low cost=++)	+	-	--
Action	Can they be used to initiate action	++	+	?

(Derived from Korpi 1983: 14-25. See also Korpi, 1985-)

As can be seen from the above presentation of the two basic power resources in capitalist society, i.e. control over the means of production and the control over labour power or human capital, the far most effective power resource is the first, and hence capitalists or employers are expected to be, at the outset, the dominant actors. However, these different power resources can be affected by changes in institutional surroundings, and specifically, the effectiveness of labour power can be enhanced by collective mobilization.

ii) This implicates different causal and, more importantly, intentional mechanisms:

Traditional causal analysis leads us to focus on those consequences which result when power resources are activated or exercised. The intentional mode of explanation, however, sensitizes us additionally to other, more indirect but important consequences of power resources [...] (Korpi, 1985: 34).

Hence, power resources theory insists on both the causal implications on actions of differences in power resources, as well as intentional consequences of different preferences and strategies, leading to complex processes of exchange and negotiation not necessarily involving conflict (see also Korpi, 1978: 37-54; 1985: 35-36). Here, the formation of interests is seen as central, together with the perception of strategic settings and rational action in accordance with one's interest and the interest of opponents. Especially this emphasis on long term strategies sets the power resource theory apart from a neo-Marxist approach, focusing more on the formation of consciousness and identity (e.g. Wright, 1985, 1997).

In this context of power, interest, exchange and negotiation, one possible strategy is investment in power resources, “i.e. present sacrifices through the conversion of resources in ways which can increase future benefits” (Korpi, 1985: 38), which involves

development of channels for the mobilization of power resources, creation of institutions for decision making and conflict regulation, conversion of power resources from more costly to less costly types, and the fostering of anticipated reactions (Korpi, 1985: 38).

On the basis of these intentional and strategic mechanisms, several hypotheses are put forward. First, it is expected, that the working class, in possession only of labour power, will tend to organize collectively, whereas capitalists or employers will not. This tendency will be furthered by the institutions of political democracy, since labour within the area of politics (in opposition to the area of economy) will be relatively stronger. Second, institutions that reduces the need for the continuous activation of power will be built, and as such, the welfare state (as well as collective bargaining) can be seen as a strategic attempt of the mobilized working class, i.e. unions and social democracy, to include more and more areas of conflict within a political context. Hence, strong welfare states will be built in countries with a strong and mobilized working class.

Turning to the present challenges for power resources theory, I will here only present a few points relevant for the present discussion (see also O’Connor and Olsen, 1998). First, I question the claim that capital and labour are the only two relevant forms of power resources in contemporary society. Although one might agree to the evaluation of the effectiveness of these two resources, a question remains why other forms of resources are not taken into consideration. There seems to be given no substantial argument, and one can only speculate whether this is due to the foundation in a Marxist conception of society (as is especially evident in Korpi, 1978).

This argument concerning multiple forms of power parallels a discussion within class analysis, where neo-Weberians as well as (or even more so) neo-Marxists have included especially organisational/bureaucratic resources and education/knowledge/skills. One can argue, though, that organizational resources are included within the power resources theory, since the building of organisations is suggested as a dynamic mechanism. Hence, I shall argue only for the inclusion of knowledge/cultural capital as an alternative power resource, relevant especially in post-industrial society. I suspect that the omission of knowledge is due to the fact that this is seen as a subtype of labour power and human capital, and hence seen as suffering from the same kind of ineffectiveness. However, I claim that this is a sociologically weak interpretation of knowledge, far too focused on labour markets and economic structures as *the* structures of society.

Second, I question the theory of action implied in the power resources theory. Thus, although power resources theory underlines the possibility of hidden mechanisms and intentional analysis, I propose that the emphasis on a rather narrow conceptualisation of rational action is too high. Also, this implies focus on conscious and identifiable actors, leaving out the possibility of what Weber class 'mass action'. Hence, below I shall argue for a more pragmatic concept of action, integrating material as well as symbolic structures and more suitable for the context of differentiation and complexity of post-industrial societies.

This last point is also related to the empirical relevance of power resources theory. Thus, although Korpi and Palme argues for the continuing relevance of power resources theory in explaining the dynamics of welfare states (in the context of austerity) (Korpi and Palme, 2003a, 2003b), the analysis of especially intentional mechanisms is weak. So, although it may be possible to depict a statistical connection between social class structure and political outcomes, the analysis of intentions and strategies of institution building seems much harder to provide. Today, there simply is no clear actor representing *the* working class.

In light of these critical postulations, I now turn to the presentation and discussion of the Bourdieuan approach. First, I discuss the concept of cultural capital and the possibility of including different power resources in the analysis of post-industrial society. Then, I turn to the discussion of dynamic mechanisms, most importantly the homology of material and symbolic structures provided by the mechanism of habitus. And finally I discuss the different forms of differentiation visible in post-industrial society, also touching upon the relevance of institutions.

Classes in post-industrial society

Bourdieu rarely uses the term power in his work. However, one could say that his sociology centres on precisely the distribution and dynamic development of different forms of power, making his introduction within the field of welfare state research, especially in connection with power resources theory, very relevant:

The social world is accumulated history, and if it is not to be reduced to a discontinuous series of instantaneous mechanical equilibria between agents who are treated as interchangeable particles, one must reintroduce into it the notion of capital and with it, accumulation and all its effects. Capital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its "incorporated", embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e. exclusive basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor. [...] And the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world (Bourdieu, 1986, 241-242).

The concept of capital, then, presents a cornerstone in the analysis of society's structural foundations, and here Bourdieu challenges an exclusive focus on economic structure and labour markets. Capital can take many different forms, all of which are connected to a field, i.e. an area of the social constituted with a certain degree of material and symbolic autonomy (Bourdieu, 2000: 17-24). In the course of history, different fields emerge, constituting themselves with distinct rules of behaviour, unspoken presumptions, distributions of power, and barriers of access, with actors struggling on precisely these dimensions. This can be said about the economic field, but parallel to the slow differentiation, development of the forces of productivity and division of labour involved in the constitution of the economic field, other fields emerge, e.g. the cultural field, the religious field, and the scientific field.

Thus, what separates Bourdieu from the classic sociological description (e.g. Marx and Weber) of the constitution of modern society, is not his conception of the economic field and the creation of sedimented structures of power, but his insistence on the much broader applicability of this analysis. The main argument, then, is that cultural capital is constituted alongside economic capital as a structurally based form of power:

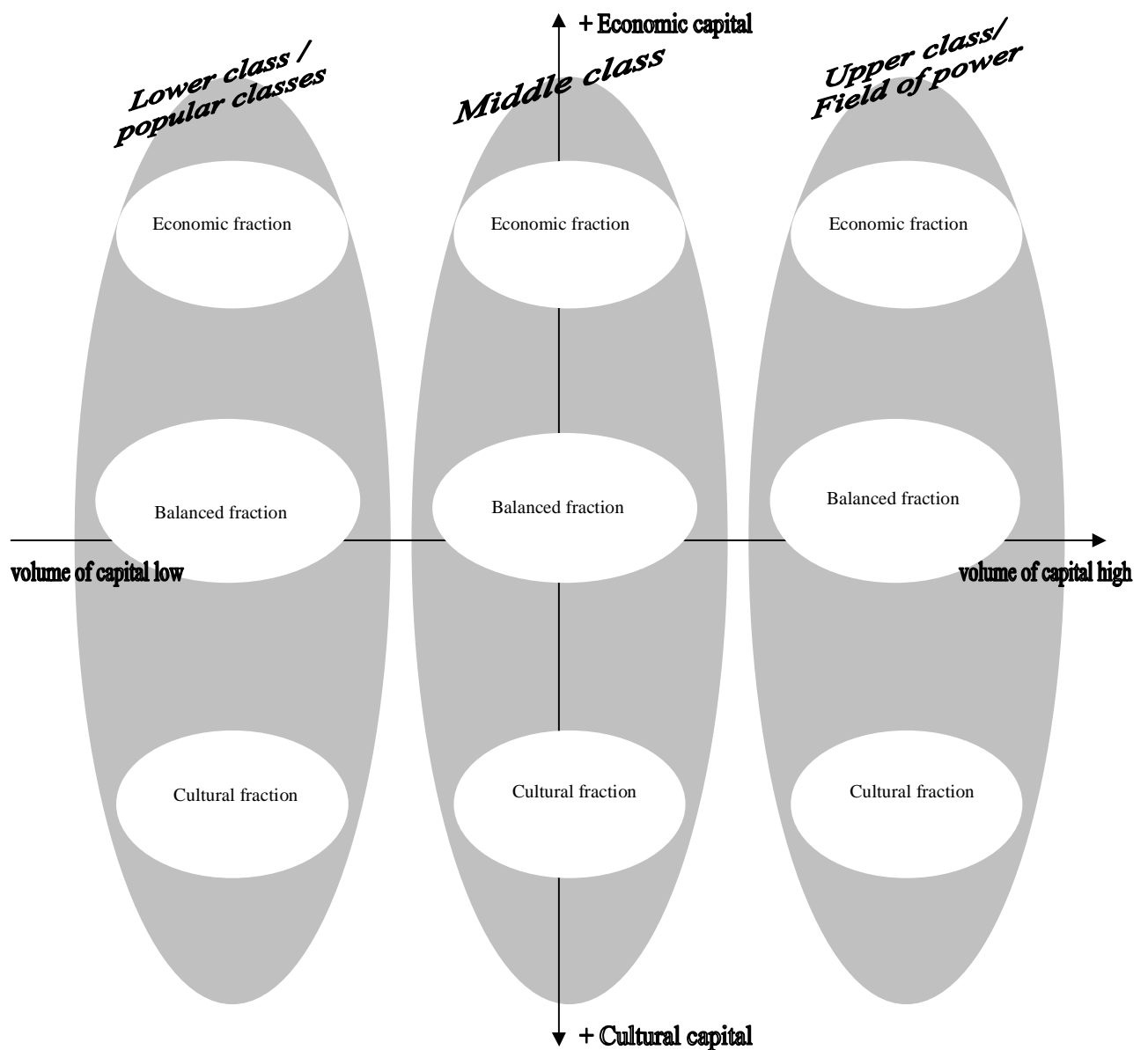
By detaching cultural resources from persons, literacy enables a society to move beyond anthropological limits – particularly those of individual memory – and liberates it from the constraints implied by mnemotechnic devices such as poetry, the conservation technique *par excellence* of non-literate societies; it makes it possible to accumulate the culture previously conserved in the incorporated state and, by the same token, to perform the primitive accumulation of cultural capital, the total or partial monopolizing of the society's symbolic resources in religion, philosophy, art and science, through the monopolization of the instruments for appropriation of these resources (writing, reading and other decoding techniques), henceforward preserved not in memories but in texts. But capital is given the conditions of its full realization only with the appearance of an educational system, which awards qualifications durably consecrating the position occupied in the structure of the distribution of culture (Bourdieu, 1990: 125).

The concept of cultural capital is central to the analysis of modern society. Bourdieu puts forward the empirical hypothesis that the two most important forms of capital in modern society are economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1998: 6). Consequently, social space exhibits a chiastic structure, with volume and composition of capital as the two main lines of differentiation. Put differently, the two most important fields in modern society, with a dominating effect beyond their own borders, are the economic field and the cultural and scientific fields, resulting in economic and cultural capital being the most important forms of power in relation to the habitus and practices of

people (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1984, Rosenlund 2001 and Harrits 2005 for empirical analysis supporting this hypothesis).

Classes are conceptualised (in a rather Weberian manner) as positions in social space, i.e. as positions with a similar amount and composition of the dominant forms of capital or power. Hence, Bourdieu suggests a two-dimensional class structure as relevant for the analysis of class struggle and class behaviour in modern society:

Figure 1: Classes in social space



Implicit in this structure are also the proposal of a different class dynamic, namely the possibility of class struggle along the vertical as well as the horizontal dimension of social space. In other words, different types of conflicts and forms of class alliances are possible in this structural setting, e.g.:

1. Conflicts on volume of capital, implicating alliances between class fractions within each of the three major classes.
2. Conflicts on type of capital or capital composition, implicating alliances between class fractions across class borders.
3. Conflicts on domination, implicating alliances between class fractions dominated in an absolute sense (the lower class) and a relative sense (cultural fractions of the middle and upper classes) against the dominating fraction of the dominating class (i.e. the economic fraction of the upper class).

Further, when seen in relation to other sociological analyses postulating the growing importance of knowledge and culture in relation to the social structure, one can say that Bourdieu puts forward two important points. First, he insists on the continuing importance of cultural capital, making post-industrial society a result of further differentiation and changing power relations more than a total break with modern or capitalist society. Second, Bourdieu points to the fact that the growing importance of cultural capital not necessarily means the growing importance of symbolic structures, discourses, or something “less solid” than the economic structures. As we shall see below, this means that Bourdieu can insist on a theory of action similar to the one relevant for the analysis of industrial or capitalist society.

Taking this analytical framework as a point of departure makes possible a hypothesis of the growing importance in post-industrial society of a third form of power: cultural capital or knowledge, founded in the systems of science and culture, and institutionalised and standardised in modern systems of education and certification. Thus, knowledge can, for example, be stored, concentrated, sold and transferred throughout generations, and can be seen as having a rather wide scope and domain (see also Savage et al, 1992), although the mobilization of knowledge may be rather costly. This implies a new actor or the growing importance numerically as well as in terms of power of the cultural upper (and possibly middle) class, including e.g. teachers, researchers, intellectuals, journalists, artists, and symbol analysts. The relation of this class to other classes and class fractions, and the possible inclusion within the welfare state or the market may be different in different welfare regimes and different systems and histories of class struggle. One possibility is

that the strengthening of the cultural fractions of the middle and upper classes has changed basic class conflicts from a question of volume of capital to a question of capital composition.

This could implicate that the fight for equality and redistribution of income is substituted by a fight between the different lifestyles, values and conceptions of 'the good life' as held by the two dominant class fractions of the upper and middle classes. In terms of welfare state policy, this may result in areas of policy connected to the possibility of realising 'the good life' (what Foucault would call technologies of the self) becoming more important. In other words social services and policy areas such as school policy, health policy and family policy may be substituting traditional welfare state policies such as unemployment policy and social benefits as the most salient for the main part of the voting population, with areas such as pension and retirement rules being still relevant.

Also, the Bourdieuan framework would suggest a different conception of the 'working class'; or rather it would substitute the term working class with the term popular or lower class, focusing on the relative position in social space of low volume of capital (economic *and* cultural, as well as other forms of capital). In this way, the importance of education (or lack of education) to social inheritance and reproduction would be underlined. Stated a bit differently, one could hypothesize the growing importance of lack of skills/education as a new social risk in post-industrial welfare states.

Reconsidering the structure-agency-link

It is not only the importance of a concept of power or capital and the relevance of distributions of power for the analysis of social change that constitutes a possible link between power resources theory and the Bourdieuan approach. Also, Korpis insistence on combining causal and intentional analysis is paralleled by Bourdieu, although the theoretical and epistemological backgrounds are somewhat different. The main point in Bourdieu's theory of action, and the concepts of habitus, positions/dispositions, homology and practice is, that objective and subjective, or material and symbolic structures must be seen as complementary views on 'one world', or rather one history:

Historians and sociologists have tended to allow themselves to be trapped in sterile opposition, such as that between [...] individual wills and structural determination. [...] To find a way out of these dilemmas, it is sufficient to observe that every historical action brings together two states of history: objectified history, i.e. the history which has accumulated over the passage of time in things, machines, buildings, monuments, books, theories, customs, law etc.; and embodied history in the form of habitus. (Bourdieu, 1981: 305)

Habitus then, is the combined dispositional structures of perception, evaluation and judgements of taste, learned throughout the life-course of an individual (moving between different positions in social space), and guiding actions, choices and strategies of this individual (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1990: 52-65). So, to analyse practices and action, one must be concerned with objective positions as well as subjective dispositions. And the 'link' between them is not causal or mechanical, but epistemological. Causal analysis of structures and 'intentional' analysis are two different analytical strategies, both necessary in the understanding of practice. Two sides of the same coin so to speak (Bourdieu, 1973, Weininger, 2002).

This implies an analysis of class positions as well as dispositions, including the constitution of interests, but also, e.g. values, lifestyles, and strategies of reproduction. Here, it is important to note, how Bourdieu dismisses the idea of collective mobilisation and collective actors as a necessary 'translation' of class structures into political action:

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations, that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operation necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor (Bourdieu, 1990: 53).

Guiding the analysis of class practices, then, is a hypothesis of homology (i.e. structural similarity) between material and symbolic structures, 'provided by' the habitus mechanism. But the hypothesis is 'only' stating homologous and not identical structures, since the mechanism is exactly the fuzzy logic of habitus and practice, and not rational calculus in a narrow sense (see especially Bourdieu 1990). Hence, the concept of strategy, interests and rationality implied in Bourdieu's theory of action must be conceived in an extremely broad manner, and this may constitute the biggest difference to power resources theory.

Also implied within this framework is the possibility of the symbolic structures and logic of lifestyles taking on a certain degree of autonomy (Bourdieu, 1984, 169-225, 466-484), as well as the conception of present capital and power distributions as the result of previous strategies and struggles. This, once again, underlines the importance of analysing different forms of strategies. Further, it points to the previously mentioned point, that within a Bourdieuan framework one does not need to postulate a changing logic of action resulting from social changes toward post-industrial society (which seems to be implied by e.g. Anthony Giddens). There has always been room for

symbolic autonomy and reflexivity of action, although the degree and scope have varied historically. What is interesting, then, is not this fact, but the effort to hypothesize, under what circumstances symbolic autonomy increases, and under what circumstances, homology prevails.

Forms of differentiation: Fields, institutions and social classes

The final important aspect of Bourdieuan theory to be included in the present discussion is the concept of a field and the conception of functional differentiation. A field is a field of positions, i.e. a distribution of a specific form of power, and as such a ‘field of forces’ causing an effect on actors moving in and through the field. But just as importantly, a field is a field of dispositions, practices and strategies, and as such a field of struggle. As mentioned above, social fields are constituted by a “long, slow process of autonomization” (Bourdieu, 1990: 67). Hence, in a field, certain logic prevails, along with certain presuppositions (doxa) and goals or stakes in the struggle between actors (illusio) (Bourdieu, 1990: 66-69).

This introduces a certain amount of complexity in the analysis of the homology between structures and practices, since this homology is present within each field, as well as between the social space of positions and the space of lifestyles and symbolic practices. Again here, it is worth mentioning the epistemological status of concepts in Bourdieuan theory. Concepts are analytical tools relevant for the empirical analysis, and do not implicate any claims as to ontological existence. Hence, the analysis of society as the distribution of dominant forms of capital and class positions (social space) and the analysis of society as an array of different fields, presenting different forms of power and struggles, can be seen as two complementary conceptions of society.

Thus, analysing different field underlines the necessity of understanding the specific historical and strategic context of actions (e.g. Bourdieu, 2005). With the autonomy of a field (doxa, illusio), the immediate context can have a rather determinant effect on the practices and strategies of an actor. But simultaneously, it is important to acknowledge the fact that fields are fields of practices, produced by a habitus. Hence, unlike autopoietic and closed systems of communication as conceptualized by Niklas Luhmann, fields are ‘open’. And practices are always a result of both habitus (i.e. the internalisation of objective or material social position in social space) and field. Bourdieuan theory thus implies a hypothesis of homology not only between material and symbolic structures, but between fields as well. Put in a slightly different way, the logic of functional differentiation is supplemented by a logic of social integration, resulting from the fact that the basic social dynamic is actors moving between different fields, carrying with them the history and experiences of past positions, struggles and practices.

Seen in relation to the analysis of welfare state dynamics and change, this suggests an important point, namely the integration of institutional and class analysis. Thus, in accordance with the logic of autonomous fields, one should be aware of the constitution of the political field, and possible subfields as e.g. social or welfare policy. This implies taking the rules of the political game (institutions), the specific history of political struggles and the immediate strategical context of politics into consideration when analysing welfare state change. On the other hand, one should also consider the hypothesis of homology between fields and social space, thus taking into consideration effects of class positions and class habitus.

Further, and most importantly, one can imagine the possibility of varying degrees of homology/autonomy. Understanding which fields are constituted with a strong field-logic, and which fields are more influenced by the logic of habitus and class, could be useful in understanding the dynamics of change. Here, two kinds of mechanisms could be suggested within the Bourdieuan approach:

1. The mechanism of autonomization and sedimentation, i.e. the process of fields, subfields or institutions developing in a path-dependent way towards an ever more strong field logic, either as result of a extreme concentration of power within the field, or as a result of a strong symbolic consensus or idea.
2. The mechanisms of power struggle between fields, or rather, between elites of the different field in what Bourdieu denotes as ‘the field of power’¹.

Elaborating on the above stated hypothesis, then, some areas of the welfare state might be undergoing a process of de-politicisation, and increasingly developing a strong institutional or field logic, for example the area of social transfers. Whereas other areas may be implicated in the ‘new’ class struggle between the economic and the cultural fractions of the upper and middle classes, which could also be formulated as the struggle, within the field of power, between economic and cultural capital. Hence, in a post-industrial society with the growing importance of knowledge and

¹ ”[T]he fact that variegated forms of capital now enters into the formula of domination implies that different principles of social primacy and legitimacy must be reckoned with and reconciled. The field of power is precisely this arena where holders of the various kinds of capital compete over which of them will prevail. At stake in these struggles amongst the dominant (oft mistaken for confrontations between ruling and subordinate classes) is the relative values and potency of rival kinds of capital, as set in particular by the going “exchange rate” between economic and cultural currencies.” (Wacquant, 1996: xi).

competences, cultural capital can possibly be developing into a more effective and more dominant power resource. Or, it could be involved in an increasingly fierce struggle vis-à-vis economic capital on the autonomy of the definition and distribution of knowledge. One hypothesis, then, could be, that supplementing the growing importance, within welfare state policy, of 'life-style politics' is the intensifying battle over the control of education and science.

Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have tried to present the Bourdieuan approach as a possible future inspiration for the understanding of welfare state change. This has been done, arguing for the theoretical and empirical relevance of the Bourdieuan approach, especially in connection to the tradition of power resources theory. Hence, I have argued that the dismissal of class analysis in welfare state research would be premature.

Theoretically, I have presented three elements. First, a new understanding of post-industrial society and the existence of new forms of power resources especially cultural capital. Second, a conception of structure and agency, combining causal and intentional analyses and focusing on different forms of symbolic practices and not only rational political action or collective mobilization. And third, the combination of an understanding of functional differentiation and development of institutions with class theory, furthering the empirical analysis of homology/autonomy in stead of fruitless theoretical debates on the importance of institutions *or* classes.

Substantially, I have presented different empirical hypotheses regarding the possible change of social dynamics within the welfare state. Here, I suggested that class conflicts may be changing from primarily being a matter of capital volume to now being a matter of capital composition or type of capital. This, supposedly, could results in the growing importance of policy areas such as school policy, health policy and family policy (i.e. social services), but also in an intensified struggle regarding the control over the production and distribution of knowledge, e.g. the policies of education and science. Finally, I suggested that this could implicate a de-politicisation of traditional welfare states policies such as social benefits, resulting from both the lack of a strong class base and the institutionalization of policy measures.

These developments, then, could result in the consolidation of a new class structural basis of the welfare state. In industrial society, the political struggle for emancipation coincided with the class interests and strategies of the numerically strongest actor (i.e. the working class), and resulted in the building of the welfare state. However, this may no longer be the case, and what could in

stead be happening, is a growing polarization between on the one hand a politically isolated and more or less powerless lower class, including individuals without any valuable forms of capital², and on the other hand, the different fractions of the upper and middle classes more concerned with their internal life-style battle and reproduction of their power-bases (be it money or knowledge) than with equality and emancipation. This, to be sure, would constitute a change of the basic dynamics of the welfare state, but it would not mean the disappearance of class.

References

- Bourdieu, Pierre (1973). "The three forms of theoretical knowledge", *Social Science Information*, 12, 1, pp. 53-80.
- Bourdieu, Pierre "Men and machine," in ed. K. Knorr-Cetina and A.V. Cicourel, *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology: Toward an Integration of Micro and Macro Sociologies*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1984a). *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1986). "The Forms of Capital" i John G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York: Greenwood Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1990). *The Logic of Practice*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1998). *Practical Reason. On the Theory of Action*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (2000). *Pascalian Meditations*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (2005). "The Political field, the Social Science Field and the Journalistic Field", in Benson, Rodney and Erik Neveu, *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Esping-Andersen, Gøsta (1990), *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Esping-Andersen, Gøsta (1999), *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Esping-Andersen, Gøsta (2002), "Towards the Good Society, Once Again?", in Esping-Andersen, Duncan Gallie, Anton Hemmerijck and John Myles, *Why we need a New Welfare State*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Esping-Andersen Gøsta & Walter Korpi (1984), "Social Policy as Class Politics in Post-war Capitalism: Scandinavia, Germany and Sweden", in Goldthorpe, J.H., *Order and Conflict in Contemporary Capitalism*, Clarendon, Oxford.

² This could be lack of education and skills, lack of economic capital (i.e. living off public support), or it could be lack of cultural skills (e.g. language) recognized in the national social space, which would be the case for the growing number of refugees and foreigners in Western Europe.

- Esping-Andersen, Gøsta & Walter Korpi (1987), "From Poor Relief to Institutional Welfare States: The Development of Scandinavian Social Policy" in Erikson, Robert, Erik Jørgen Hansen, Stein Ringen & Hannu Uusitalo, *The Scandinavian Model. Welfare States and Welfare Research*, M.E. Sharpe Inc., New York.
- Goul Andersen, Jørgen (2000), *Change without Challenge. Welfare States, Social Construction of Challenge and Dynamics of Path Dependency*, Working Paper 14-2000, Centre for Comparative Welfare Studies.
(See <http://www.socsci.aau.dk/ccws/Workingpapers/Workingpapers.htm>).
- Harrits, Gitte Sommer (2005), *Hvad betyder klasse? En rekonstruktion af klassebegrebet med henblik på en analyse af politisk deltagelse i Danmark*, Ph.d.-afhandling, Politica, Århus.
- Korpi, Walter (1978), *The Working Class in Welfare Capitalism: Work, Unions and Politics in Sweden*, Routledge and Keagan Paul, London.
- Korpi, Walter (1983), *The Democratic Class Struggle*, Routledge and Keagan Paul, London.
- Korpi, Walter (1985), "Power Resources Approach vs. Action and Conflict: On Causal and Intentional Explanation in the Study of Power", *Sociological Theory*, 3, pp. 31-45.
- Korpi, Walter (1998), "The Iceberg of Power below the Surface: A Preface to Power Resources Theory" in O'Connor, Julia & Gregg. M. Olsen (1998), *Power Resources Theory and the Welfare State: A Critical Approach. Essays Collected in honour of Walter Korpi*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto.
- Korpi, Walter (2001), "An Augmented Rational-Action Analysis of the Origins and Path Dependency of Welfare State Institutions in Western Countries", in *Rationality and Society*, 13, 2, pp. 235-283.
- Korpi, Walter & Joakim Palme (2003a), "Klasspolitik og "nypolitik" under knapphet och globalisering: Åtstramning av välfärdsstater i 18 länder 1975-1995", in *Sociologisk Forskning*, 4, pp. 45-85
- Korpi, Walter & Joakim Palme (2003b), "New Politics and Class Politics in the Context of Austerity and Globalization: Welfare State Regress in 18 Countries, 1975-95, in *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, no. 3, pp. 425-446.
- Laclau, Ernesto & Chantal Mouffe (1985). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, London: Verso.
- Lipset, S.M. & Clark, T.N. (1991). "Are Social Classes Dying?", in *International Sociology*, 6, 4, 397-410.
- Marshall, T.H. (1950/1992), "Citizenship and Social Class" in Marshall, T.H. and Tom Bottomore (1992), *Citizenship and Social Class*, Pluto Press, London.
- O'Connor, Julia & Gregg. M. Olsen (1998), *Power Resources Theory and the Welfare State: A Critical Approach. Essays Collected in honour of Walter Korpi*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto.
- Pakulski, Jan & Malcolm Waters (1996). *The Death of Class*, London: SAGE.
- Pierson, Paul (1994), *Dismantling the Welfare State? Reagan, Thatcher, and the Politics of Retrenchment*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

- Rosenlund, Lennart (2000). *Social Structures and Change: Applying Pierre Bourdieu's Approach and Analytical Framework*, Stavanger: Stavanger University Press.
- Savage, Mike, James Barlow, Peter Dickens & Tony Fielding (1992). *Property, Bureaucracy and Culture. Middle-class Formation in Contemporary Britain*, London: Routledge.
- van Kersbergen, Kees (1995), *Social Capitalism. A Study of Christian democracy and the Welfare State*, Routledge, London.
- Wacquant, Loïc J.D. (1996), "Foreword", in Bourdieu, Pierre, *The State Nobility*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Weininger, Elliot B. (2002). "Class and Causation in Bourdieu", *Current Perspectives in Social Theory: Bringing Capitalism Back for Critique by Social Theory*, 21, pp. 49-114.
- Wright, Erik Olin (1985). *Classes*, London: Verso.
- Wright, Erik Olin (1997). *Class Counts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.